

Transition from TIMS to NEDSS Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This FAQ sheet assumes the reader has some basic knowledge of the Public Health Information Network (PHIN), the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS), and the NEDSS Base System (NBS). Please visit these websites for information regarding these systems: <http://www.cdc.gov/phinf/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/nedss/>.

Q1. I've heard TIMS is retiring. What kind of system is going to replace TIMS?

A: CDC has embarked on an initiative to improve its disease surveillance data reporting. This initiative has involved developing and implementing a new system called NEDSS. As part of this effort, the Division of TB Elimination (DTBE), in consultation with an Information Technology (IT) contractor, is developing the NEDSS Tuberculosis Surveillance Program Area Module (TB PAM). This will replace the surveillance module in TIMS. The TB PAM is a Web-based system that will collect RVCT data (only) at this point.

Q2. What if my state has chosen to implement a PHIN-compatible system (non-NBS)?

A: Several sites are developing systems or using systems from private vendors. These non-CDC systems must meet the Public Health Information Network (PHIN) messaging requirements to be able to transfer surveillance data to CDC. CDC is not supporting the non-CDC systems.

Q3. What will I do for TB patient management data collection?

A: A parallel project for patient management (PM) is being developed. This project's goal is to provide a tool for local and state TB control programs to use in evaluating existing software based on defined "Core" requirements for PM. Further information on the TB PAM and the PM project is located on the TB Public Web Board: <http://web-tb.forum.cdc.gov>.

Q4. When will TIMS be retired and when will the transition to NEDSS start?

A: TIMS will be retired for each reporting area in a planned approach based on that area's TB surveillance reporting needs and its progress towards converting to the PHIN/NEDSS infrastructure. TIMS will not be completely retired until all sites have transitioned from that system. We will work with sites to aid them in a successful transition, regardless of whether they are using NEDSS or another compatible system. Because each reporting area will have differing timelines for this task, it is difficult to predict a definitive date when TIMS will no longer be supported by CDC. However, we expect the NEDSS TB software (TB PAM) to be deployed in 2005.

Q5. What will happen to the data I already have in TIMS?

A: If you are planning on using the NEDSS TB PAM, your historical TIMS surveillance data will be included in the transition from TIMS to the TB PAM. If your state will not be using NEDSS, you will need to plan for this migration. TIMS technical staff are available to help answer questions about the data validations that will be needed when these become documented and available. For states not using NEDSS, TIMS data can be exported out of TIMS right now. For assistance or instructions in how to do this, see your TIMS User Guide or contact the TIMS Help Desk at (770) 234-6500. TIMS data can be exported in various formats and then merged into a replacement system. This will require some configuration for matching the data between the different file structures of TIMS and the new system.

Q6. Is there an option for local TB programs to use NEDSS and then transmit their data to the state TB database? If yes, how do we merge local data into the state TB database? Or, will NEDSS be used only by state TB programs?

A: Unlike TIMS, there will not be separate installations of the application at each local level and the state. The NEDSS Base System will be installed and accessed only at the state level. Using Web-based technology, each local jurisdiction will access the same database located at the state level. Each state will need to determine how its local jurisdictions will update the TB data. Because the database resides only at the state, local sites will not have to use a separate program to send any local data to the state.

Q7. Will local variables (such as the current local and global User-Defined Variables [UDVs] in TIMS) be available in the NEDSS TB PAM?

A: Since there is only a state database, there will only be a "global type" of variable. In the NBS, a Local Defined Field (LDF) will be available for all jurisdictions within the state. There will not be a local jurisdiction LDF available during the initial release of the TB PAM. This may change in a subsequent release.

Q8. Will state TB staff be able to add or modify these variables? Or will a programmer be needed?

A: Local Defined Fields (LDFs) will be created and updated by the state NEDSS Base System Administrator. The administrator may grant the security authority to others, but that is the decision of each individual state. The NBS Administrator does not have to be a programmer. Adding or modifying an LDF is a matter of completing a series of Web-based screens. For making edits to a field, knowledge of Java Scripts is necessary.

Q9. Will the RVCT be updated? If so, when?

A: The current draft of the revised Report of Verified Case of Tuberculosis (RVCT) form includes 12 new data elements, and the instructions and definitions for many existing data elements have been updated. A copy of the proposed revised RVCT was distributed to TB Controllers in early 2003 and can be obtained by contacting Dr. Eileen Schneider (404-639-5345, ees2@cdc.gov). The Division of TB Elimination (DTBE) is planning to 1) obtain comments on the revised RVCT from various organizations, including the National TB Controllers Association, and 2) work with reporting areas to ensure that RVCT alignment and integration into the TB PAM is complete and smooth (e.g., conduct training sessions). Reporting areas will have several opportunities to comment on and prepare for the implementation of the revised RVCT. Once the revised RVCT is finalized, DTBE must obtain Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval prior to implementation. Since finalization of the revised RVCT form is dependent on several factors, it is unclear, at this time, when it will be implemented. However, DTBE is aware of the need to implement any changes in a timeframe that considers the users of PHIN-compatible systems and allows those users to incorporate these new items to create PHIN MS messages.

Q10. Will a data dictionary (or its equivalent) be available?

A: Yes. The TB PAM will provide a vocabulary specification document. This document is expected to be available in late 2004, depending on TB PAM construction progress.

Q11. What reporting and data query functions will be included in the TB PAM/NEDSS?

A: Data reporting and query functions in NEDSS and the TB PAM are still under development at CDC. It is expected that these activities will eventually have functionality similar to or greater than the query and reporting functions currently in TIMS. The current TB PAM will offer several standard reports. As a part of NEDSS,

the Statistical Analysis Software (SAS) application will be bundled and available to those reporting areas using the NBS. Reporting areas will have the ability to export their data from the TB PAM and import it into other software packages (e.g., Epi Info, SPSS, STATA, Access, and Excel) for data management and reporting functions.

Q12. Will variables for genotyping be included?

A: The TB PAM will not collect genotyping data at this time. The NTCA-CDC Genotyping Workgroup is working to define options for collecting genotyping data by other mechanisms.

Q13. What will be the mechanism for electronically transmitting the Aggregate Reports for Program Evaluation (ARPE) information to CDC after TIMS is no longer functioning? Is this part of the Surveillance PAM?

A: The scope of the TB PAM does not currently address electronic capture of ARPE Contact Investigation (CI) data. The Field Services and Evaluation Branch (FSEB) will accept your state's ARPE reports via fax, or they can be mailed. Additional information for transmission of these reports will be provided by FSEB.

Q14. My state is going to use NEDSS, but the local levels may use patient management-type systems. Can I get their surveillance data electronically?

A: CDC must receive data files from the reporting area via either the TB PAM or a PHIN-compatible system. How a state receives data from local reporting areas is between the state and those areas. The TB Surveillance PAM team will develop an implementation guide that will define how to "write" the TB message that needs to be reported to CDC. If a local system is using something other than the TB PAM, the local system will need its vendor to provide an exporting capability for writing out the TB message that will be sent to the state for transfer to CDC via the TB PAM or PHIN-compatible system.

Q15. My state is going to use NEDSS NBS. What steps should my program implement during the next few months and next year?

A: Establish an account on the TB public Web board (<http://web-tb.forum.cdc.gov>) and check for updates. Contact the DTBE Sites Using NEDSS (SUN) team with questions by emailing us at thpam@cdc.gov. Establish regular meetings with your state NEDSS coordinator.

